

Performing diversity in design futures

In InnArbeid we have observed that participation and involvement increases an anticipation of social synchronicity, as opposed to social conformity. I discuss some concerns and considerations on diversity seen through embodied perspectives on design, inclusion and in particular on technology.

InnArbeid project

The trepidations of a futures perspective on diversity arise from the research in InnArbeid. InnArbeid is an innovation project working towards developing services and digital applications in order to enable young persons with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) to find, gain and retain a position in working life. We focus in particular on supporting the transition from school to finding work and the onwards support needed to sustaining their role in working life. We have involved people with ID as well as the vast array of people who work, care and collaborate with them, into every phase of the innovation.

The project is currently applying for permission for further involvement of young people with disability, in the concept and technology development phases of the project. Our experience is that legislation in place due to care and concern, may equally hinder their involvement and thus development of new possible roles. The perception of how people with ID are able to work is changing as are the technological possibilities. Left unchallenged technology typically exclude this group of people, yet it is precisely by way of technology development that we may develop novel ways of inclusion and support, through connections and communications tailored to the individual quirks and specifications of people with ID that do not adhere to the norm.

The designers' agency

I argue that there is a need to re-examine inclusion, diversity and agency through design practice to create ways to account for identity, culture and diversity in design decisions and future research trajectories. In such an approach, cultural forms of representation, processes of knowledge production and the impact of designers' engagement and agency must be examined more carefully, through a performative reading of design practice, and of agency. Designer's achieve their designs through collaborative means; processes tethered to individual histories and cultures in building identity and communicating culture. This is particularly central for atypical processes of participation, such as for young people with autism, whereby 'the involvement of autistic scholars in research and improvements in participatory methods can thus be seen as a requirement, if social research in the field of autism is to claim ethical and epistemological integrity' (Milton 2014).

Designing future engagements

There are challenges in designing processes that determine a particular future scenario - to account for others without including and engaging such 'others' and making room for the ensuing subversiveness of diversity. An understanding of what is at stake is made available through attention and experience. Design processes and designer's involvement may serve as a conduit for social imagination and as a gateway for self-expression and reflection. However, people with ID challenge cognitive-driven models of knowledge building whereby we understand social interaction as contingent on the development of shared understanding of the mental states of others, known as theory of mind (Baron-Cohen 1999). In InnArbeid there is an ambition to include the expertise of a group of people usually designed for and not *with* - people with ID. Designing futures may thus become an alternative site for the understanding of potential instigation and

organization of diversity to reside. Ideally, diverse views and ideas in new forms would draw an attentive, diverse readership that would eventually understand and, hopefully, champion the innumerable manifestations, old and new, of diversity thinking and making.

Experience matters

Vitality and engagement is the human communicative tissue that weaves together our social anticipations and creative aspirations (Reynolds & Reason 2012). When we divert from communication as a fluid, dynamic process of transmission - from tacit sensations to more explicit, expressive bids for communication - these incremental developments of self, culture and future becomes disruptive elements - sign of the other and the different. Embodied learning is of particular interest within human-computer interaction (HCI) contexts - for example, third-wave HCI - where notions of contingent interaction have moved beyond interface semiotics toward full body interaction and felt experience (Harrison, Sengers, & Tatar 2011). Yet when the diverse stories are viewed as preferences and perspectives and seen as a design material, it can signal a wider view of what constitutes the human self, we may incorporate a more inclusive and fluid model of the human experience and how that is made to matter.

Engaged involvements

Furthermore, close involvement in the innovation work will open for dialogue that not only limited to the identified problems, but also to be able to recognise new opportunity spaces. As this project shows, complexity lies not only in the collection of insights, but also in development and implementation. Our work has placed knowledge of others under particular scrutiny by experimenting with engagements, presentation, conversations and exhibitions, graphical displays and responsive feedback that draw attention to self, agency and the contingencies of communication. Thus, our work raises questions on issues of human efficacy and agency, and in turn on the ethics of how differences and variation are handled in techno-centred innovation- and design-processes.

References:

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